

Preparing for NIIW

Immunization rates for children younger than 2 years in the United States are at their highest level in history. However, there is still much work to be done. More than 900,000 children are not fully immunized. Thousands of lives are in jeopardy from preventable diseases, and hundreds of thousands of dollars are being spent on the care of stricken children whose illnesses could have been avoided. National and community organizations and health departments can play an important role in ensuring that all our children are appropriately immunized by the age of 2. Health care providers need to actively communicate with parents/caregivers about immunization, especially when improvements in vaccines result in changes to the immunization schedule.

Parents/caregivers need to know that their children can and will be protected against many childhood diseases. During National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW), efforts will be made around the country to achieve immunization goals. This guide will help you and others in these efforts. In this guide, you will find the information you need to conduct activities that educate parents and increase awareness among health care providers. The guide tells how to choose and conduct activities that are appropriate for your community and organization during NIIW as well as throughout the year. The guide divides program planning into four steps:

1. *Lay the foundation.* Get to know the needs and resources in your community, assess activities conducted in previous years, and shape your plan accordingly.
2. *Select activities.* Choose from a variety of activities to promote immunization.
3. *Work with others.* Get out the immunization message by collaborating with businesses and organizations and working with the media.
4. *Chart your success.* Look at what you have accomplished and learned and build on your success. Use the information you have gained to guide future activities.

Following these steps will help you create a program that is tailored to the needs of your community or enhance your existing program. Some communities will have the resources to undertake the major activities suggested in this guide. In other cases, groups will start by choosing more modest activities. No matter what you are able to do, your activities will be a vital part of the many immunization education activities being developed all over the country.

STEP 1: LAY THE FOUNDATION

Successful programs result when the community's needs are considered, specific objectives set, and resources used wisely. Here is information on how to lay the necessary foundation.

KNOW YOUR COMMUNITY'S NEEDS

Most community education programs begin with the commitment and initiative of one or two people who recognize a need or opportunity. The purpose of a needs assessment is to further explore and define needs and opportunities, e.g., by determining previous and current immunization activities. What you learn in this step will help shape the rest of your program.

KNOW YOUR OBJECTIVES

Before you begin program activities, consider their purpose. You have a better chance of having an impact if you focus on a few well-defined objectives. Keep in mind that every community has its own unique combination of people, organizations, needs, and concerns; so immunization programs will take different forms in different places.

The Childhood Immunization Initiative (CII) focuses on several objectives. These objectives help ensure that children in America are fully protected against vaccine-preventable disease. You may find during your needs assessment that many of CII's areas of concern match those in your community. This guide focuses on objectives that reach parents/caregivers and providers directly. They are:

- To remind parents/caregivers about the importance of immunizing children.
- To encourage parents/caregivers to check their children's immunization records.
- To increase infant immunization rates in the community.
- To encourage health care providers to talk with parents/caregivers about immunization services and options.
- Most community organizations find that they can take on one or two objectives at a time, then add to or alter their strategies as the program progresses or community needs change.

Who Is the Audience?

The primary audience for an immunization campaign is parents/caregivers of children ages 2 or younger. Research shows that a significant proportion of the adult U.S. population is unaware of the need for immunizations or the risks associated with underimmunization. To identify your target audience:

- Check data from your own organization, local health department, and social service and community planning agencies for the number of parents and caregivers in your community and where they live.
- Find out whether parents/caregivers belong to any organizations and where and when they meet. Consider contacting the organizations.
- Recruit community leaders and involve them in finding the best ways to identify and reach your audience.
- Ask newspapers and broadcast stations to describe their readers, listeners, and viewers.
- The other main audience for your campaign is health care providers. It is important for health care providers to keep accurate immunization records of their patients and communicate with parents and caregivers about their children's immunizations. It also is important to find health

- care providers who can assist with free or low-cost immunization services.
- To identify health care providers who serve a variety of populations or special needs:
 - Check with the local health department and social service agency to determine providers to whom parents and caregivers are most frequently referred.
 - Check directories for hospitals and clinics (e.g., Indian, Migrant, or Rural Health Services) located in your community.
 - Identify associations of hospitals or clinics in your area. Call the National Immunization Information Hotline, 1-800-232-2522 (English) or 1-800-232-0233 (Spanish), which can direct you to local clinics.
 - Find local physicians who will be spokespersons or are willing to reach other physicians with the immunization message.

What Are Others Doing?

Contact your local health department or the National Immunization Information Hotline to learn of any statewide or local coalitions promoting immunization services in your area. If there is a coalition in your community, make contact and join forces, if possible. If there is no coalition, take these steps to find out what is being done in your area:

Contact your local health department's immunization program. In some areas, the childhood immunization program may be a part of the maternal and child health program or the communicable disease prevention program. The health department will be able to tell you about public immunization services and may be able to give you information on private providers that participate in public programs such as the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program. The VFC Program provides free vaccines for children 0-18 years of age who are Medicaid-enrolled, have no health insurance, or are American Indian/Alaskan Native. The health department can also provide data on immunization coverage in your area.

Contact managed care organizations to learn about their immunization initiatives and child health plans. Hospitals can give you information on their services, including special clinics or services provided in emergency rooms and outreach programs. If your area has a community, rural, or migrant health program, make contact to find out what they are doing to help in vaccinating children.

Contact organizations serving specific groups. For example, if there is a large Native American community in your town, there may be a tribal council or other group that helps guide health promotion and disease prevention activities for its members. Some members of your community may access social and human services through community-based organizations. Other examples of programs that may be interested in immunization and disease prevention include programs for the homeless, battered women, refugees/recent immigrants, children in foster care, and persons with chronic diseases.

Contact local voluntary programs that may be affiliates of national organizations that have joined in immunization promotion efforts. Examples include Rotary International and Kiwanis. Your local library may have a listing or directory of local social and health service organizations as well

as reference books such as the Encyclopedia of Associations. Your librarian may also be able to access the Internet to obtain information on other resources and sources of information.

KNOW YOUR RESOURCES

Consider your resources—staff time, funds, and facilities, as well as expertise, contacts, and credibility. Sometimes commitment and enthusiasm can be your most valuable resources.

You may need to find resources outside your own organization. Potential sources of support include local affiliates of national and State immunization-related organizations, businesses, media, and volunteer organizations. They may be able to help you not only with funds but also with in-kind donations. For example, a printer might agree to reproduce materials or an advertiser might agree to donate a billboard for your program.

If you need extra funds to accomplish what you want to do, consider applying for small grants from local corporations or foundations. Volunteer and civic groups and even retailers—such as pharmacies or baby product stores—also may provide small donations, especially if your program publicity can acknowledge their contribution.

Consider what you can do in the short term and the long term. A short-term project may center on distributing materials before National Infant Immunization Week in April. It is important to start thinking about long-term projects for the purpose of sustaining high infant immunization rates. Minimizing your activities and long-range goals may result in lower immunization rates.

There are many activities from which to choose for your immunization campaign. The ideas here are divided into four levels. Those in Level I require modest amounts of time and other resources. Levels II and III demand a little more organization and commitment from volunteers or staff.

LEVEL I: GETTING STARTED

The following activities require minimal amounts of time and resources.

- Ask newspapers and newsletters to publish public service print ads, articles, or editorials.
- Write a news release, opinion-editorial piece, or letter to the editor
- Ask employers/businesses to use payroll or bill stuffers (especially for utility company, bank, and credit card statements).
- Ask religious leaders to include messages about disease prevention in their sermons and prayers.
- Ask Hispanic church leaders, local members of The Congress of National Black Churches and the Interfaith Alliance to announce National Infant Immunization Week in church bulletins and newsletters. Also ask them to include immunization materials or print ads in their newsletters and bulletins or to distribute brochures during services and other events.
- Ask churches to provide fact sheets and coupons for free or reduced-cost immunizations through the church bulletin and at the church nursery.

- Work with a local fast-food restaurant or chain to heighten awareness by printing immunization messages on tray place mats and window banners. The restaurant could offer food discounts with proof of immunization.
- Ask large companies to pay for placement of radio or newspaper ads about your program.
- Ask advertisers to include immunization print ads or reproducible art in their ads in local newspapers.
- Ask local businesses if they have printing capabilities and can reprint materials on immunization (offer a credit line on the materials acknowledging their donation).
- Provide immunization brochures for distribution at baby product stores and health clinics.
- Establish an immunization education center in your office, at a local library, at major worksites, or at other walk-in locations.
- Ask unions to distribute immunization materials to their members who are parents or caregivers.
- Ask merchants to display posters and tent cards, use bag stuffers for customers, include an immunization message on store receipts, or make loudspeaker announcements.
- Prepare scoreboards or loudspeaker announcements for sports events, rodeos, concerts, or bingo games.
- Ask high school clubs or art classes to design and construct banners or portable exhibits for use at community events.
- Send letters about your plans to the editors of State medical journals, other professional journals, and local newspapers.
- Hold a breakfast for employers, religious leaders, or media representatives, and ask them to get involved with your activities.
- Prepare and distribute newsletter articles for employers, neighborhood associations, utility companies, or other organizations with newsletters.
- Ask to speak at an organization's event such as an Interfaith Alliance meeting.

LEVEL II: ENHANCING YOUR PROGRAM

- The following activities demand a little more effort from volunteers and staff, and possibly more funding, than activities in Level I.
- Ask producers of radio call-in shows and television public affairs shows to feature immunization activities; offer to provide background information on immunizations, sample questions and answers, and someone to interview.
- Arrange for a pediatrician or someone who represents your program to appear on a television or radio talk show.
- Ask retailers, banks, or other merchants to sponsor an immunization event or eminar or to distribute information.
- Solicit local churches to ask their members with small children to bring in their immunization records. Recruit and train volunteers to check the immunization records and refer children to providers if needed.
- Ask shopping mall management to sponsor a health fair, make room for an exhibit, or provide space for a "questions and answers about immunization" table or booth.
- Hold an immunization poster contest for students and offer donated prizes. Exhibit entries in a

mall, community center, library, local bus station, or other public place frequented by your priority population.

- Ask a local toy store to provide educational materials during National Infant Immunization Week and discounts with proof of immunization.
- Create a resource kit on vaccine-preventable diseases and distribute at community events. Work with merchants to promote special gifts related to immunization for Mother's Day, Father's Day, Grandparent's Day, and other special days or weeks.
- Ask local shoe stores to disseminate immunization information during Back-to-School promotions. The store could also place banners in their windows, include supplements in their advertisements, and offer discounts with proof of immunization.. Offer the stores public recognition for their participation.
- Ask employers to establish incentives for employees who are parents/caregivers to have their children vaccinated.
- Acknowledge the coalition's partners at a special luncheon.
- Use promotional items, such as coffee mugs, buttons, or T-shirts with an immunization message and logo for your volunteers to wear at special events, to offer for sale at events, and to give to contributors as a "thank you."
- Imprint balloons with the immunization message and logo to mark the spot at special events.
- Talk with transportation companies about placing print ads with your immunization message in buses, cabs, and jitneys. Alternatively, drivers could pass out cards with the immunization message to their passengers.
- Imprint theme cups for sports events and health fairs. Imprint bags at supermarkets and pharmacies. Imprint tray inserts at fast-food chains.n Ask a radio station to do a live broadcast from your event, and have parents/ caregivers and health care providers interviewed about immunization.
- Ask a radio station to participate on a day during National Infant
- Immunization Week or another special day by broadcasting, hourly, an immunization message; provide broadcasters with live announcer copy.
- Work with billboard and transit companies to seek public service space where it is most likely to reach your audience.
- Develop a speakers' program and offer presentations to community hospitals, churches, libraries, recreation centers, club meetings, and worksite brown bag lunches; identify speakers (e.g., health care providers, people affected by disease due to lack of immunization, media spokespersons) and provide them with a prepared speech or talking points.
- Distribute materials to social service agencies that serve children such as foster homes, refugee centers, homeless shelters, and family daycare centers.
- n Adapt this kit and create your own local immunization package to disseminate to organizations.

- **LEVEL III: BROADENING YOUR SCOPE**

- The following activities require more organization, planning, staff, and resources than those in the previous levels. Some of these activities may serve to sustain long-term, high immunization

rates in your community.

- During the week preceding National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW), have your Governor, First Lady, and coalition members kick off the week with a press conference and proclamation for NIIW.
- Issue a news release and/or op-ed piece to kick off National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW). Include information about county immunization rates, local NIIW events, and clinic hours. Put posters or announcements on bulletin boards or in windows of laundromats, fast-food restaurants, or grocery stores used by community members.
- Print information in a community or resident newsletter. People often read newsletters more attentively and regularly than they read a regional newspaper.
- Contact local television stations and ask them to run public service announcements on immunization. In many communities, parents/ caregivers who stay at home prefer television to other media.
- Offer limited time only coupons for free or reduced-cost vaccinations for parents/caregivers with limited or no health insurance or with demonstrated financial need. The coupons could be distributed through pharmacies, health centers, grocery stores, or places of worship.
- Time public service announcements (PSAs) to coincide with National Infant Immunization Week or a county fair or special community event attracting parents/caregivers of small children; staff a booth at the activity.
- Assemble a gift package (including coupons and samples from local merchants) for parents/caregivers who bring their children to health clinics.
- Keep a list of people who visit an exhibit or booth, and send follow-up cards to remind them that they should get their child immunized before the age of 2.
- Recruit local housing authorities to allow volunteers to conduct a door-to-door educational campaign. A mobile unit could be brought on site to provide immediate service.
- Publish a periodic child health newsletter to highlight medical facts, community news and events, and suggestions for ways to get involved in your program.
- Partner with local elementary schools to ask older children to take the immunization message home to parents/caregivers of children by sponsoring a poster contest. Suggest using the theme “We’re helping to protect our little brothers and sisters.” Invite special guests to an event announcing the poster winners. Use the first-place poster for your next immunization campaign.
- Ask a local college health education, marketing, or communications department or a public relations firm to conduct a community survey about immunization awareness. Publicize the results.
- Ask local churches to allow local community health providers to deliver immunization services at the church. A mobile unit could be brought on site during National Infant Immunization Week.
- Set up a program for individuals who need transportation to health clinics or doctors’ offices.
- Hold an open house for community groups to join the effort to immunize children and prevent disease. Invite a guest celebrity. Give out awards to deserving individuals and organizations.
- Distribute an immunization tag line” and campaign logo to major businesses to include in their print and television advertising during National Infant Immunization Week. Issue a press release

summarizing all the businesses and organizations that are helping to get the word out about infant immunization.

- Encourage members of Congress and State legislators to visit programs geared toward the needs of lower socioeconomic groups and bring publicity to the immunization issue.
- Send a letter to your Governor requesting that s/he ask county officials, mayors, and city council members for their active involvement in the immunization issue.
- Organize a press event with local officials to highlight local immunization rates, issue a challenge to residents to raise these rates, inform the public of local National Infant Immunization Week events, and thank coalition members and clinic staff for their hard work.